



June Kaminski

BellaOnline's [Web Design](#) Editor

New Year's Web Site CheckUp

The New Year is the perfect time to take stock, and objectively examine your current web site, and how it scores as far as quality, currentness, and standards of excellence goes. If you are in business, you should include a critical examination of your marketing patterns and how these could improve. As well, look at how you serve your customers - is the process as seamless and enjoyable as possible...for them??



Setting Goals for your Site

The first step in this process is to set some good old-fashioned New Years goals for your site. Your specific goals will be as unique as your site is. They will also depend on the type of site you operate - is it a personal site? A not-for-profit service or informational site? Is it a commerce-driven commercial site? All of these categories of site types will influence the type of goals you might set. But there are basic goals that apply to all sites across categories.

To help you to brainstorm your goals, ask yourself:

1. Does my site need a face lift?
(Is the design outdated? Are you tired of the general appearance? Is the coding used to create the site outdated?)
2. Does my site score high in usability?
3. Is my web traffic satisfactory?
4. Are my links and content up-to-date?
5. Does my site convey the "message" I want to offer on the Internet?

Planning Your Face lift

If you answered Question Number 1 above in the affirmative, here are some tips for you to consider.

1. Depending on when your site was built, you should inspect your coding to ensure that your html, css, php, and so on code is up-to-date. You can check your code against the [W3C standards here](#).
2. Review each page of your site across browsers. Ensure that you yourself have the latest editions of the common browsers on your own computer, and check each page to ensure that it looks the way you want it to, within the browser. At least try Internet Explorer and Firefox, but many people also use other browsers like Safari. Sites can often look confusingly different depending on the browser you are using.
3. If your content is getting outdated, inspect it to see how you can recycle what you have, yet bring it up to date. Sometimes, you simply need to look for more current reference for articles and such, and to add onto existing content if new discoveries or progress make your content seem archaic.
4. Make sure to update the current year in your copyright statements or footer references e.g. © 2002 - 2010.

Boosting Traffic Goals

1. If your traffic is not what you would like, resolve to find ways to attract more people to your site. One simple way is to provide more meaningful, easily accessible content. Give them something worth visiting for.
2. Another way to boost traffic is to check the metatags in the "head" area of your webpages. Make sure that keywords are generously provided, and are reflective of your content. Include clear and accurate descriptions of each page in its individual metatag description fields as well. Make sure the "title" also reflects a clear description of each page as well. Attending to these will help search engines like Google and Yahoo spider your site, and include more of your pages in their listings.
3. Take a good look at your navigation and ensure that it is clear and consistent across your pages. If people get confused trying to figure out where to go, they are going to quickly choose to exit the site.
4. Last but not least, inspect each page of your site to ensure that everything works. Links go to viable sites, not dead ends. Flash, videos and other media download in a reasonable time, and work well. Images too download quickly and are low in byte size.

Take Your Time and Do It Right

Try to approach meeting your web site goals in a creative and expansive way. Try to see your web site through the eyes of the visitors that come to your site. Think too about the characteristics of sites you love to frequent. What makes you want to go back, again and again? Also, what turns you off when you visit a site that you choose to leave immediately? Does your own site exhibit any qualities of these sites? Owning a web site is a dynamic process - in order to keep it at the cutting-edge of cyberspace, it requires continual evolution. Learn as much as you can about owning and evolving a web site, and yours will be around for years to come, drawing in a continuous stream of satisfied visitors and customers.

Tools to help You

Google Calendar can help you keep track of your goals and progress: <http://www.google.com>

DotProject can help plan large revisions and other strategies. Read my article about this great open source software: <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art52597.asp>

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